



Who Cares?

Why you should include family members in caregiving right from the start.

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How do you include your family members?

A loved one's continued independence requires a supportive network. Invite family members to join you on this journey by:

- Explaining the situation as you understand it.
- Offering to keep them informed as changes occur.
- Letting them know you value their involvement (any type they may be able to offer).
- Committing to a practice of respectful communication. Share feelings and encourage them to share theirs, too. Discuss new alternatives, planning, and limits on availability.

Your Last Will and Testament states how you want your property and possessions to be distributed after your death.

What's Next?

The next part involves talking -- lots of talking! It's too lengthy a topic for now, so I'll save it for next month! In the meantime, it is February, the month of love. Love is a willingness to be vulnerable. Invite your family to join you as you step into this uncharted territory. Allow yourself to need them. They just might surprise you!

Questions? Comments? Let me know!

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"They never ask how we're doing. They're too busy and don't want to be bothered. They never offer to give me a break, after everything we've done for them."

- It can seem like family members aren't there for you when you become a caregiver.

"My parents are impossible. They won't even consider leaving the family home they've been in for 40 years. They can barely manage the stairs."

"My father just had a stroke, and it turns out he has almost no savings, even though I've been asking him about planning for months."

- It can seem like parents get more and more stubborn as they age

Do you remember the classic line from the movie Cool Hand Luke?

"What we have here is a failure to communicate!"

Anger and hurt feelings -- not to mention depression, frustration, and estrangement -- are the products of conversations that never happened. Wow! When you look at it this way, those difficult conversations are worth their weight in gold. The question is: Where do you start?

As a family mediator who meets with families of older adults, I have discovered an interesting paradox. If you ask me, "Who cares?" I can truthfully respond, "Families care." Even the ones who act like they don't.

It's important to include family members in the caregiving journey as early as possible, and here's why:

A loved one's rapid or gradual loss of independence impacts everyone in the family. When family members have no control over what's happening, it can make them feel helpless. And when people feel helpless their reactions are often unpredictable. Adult children particularly may pull away and avoid the situation or bring up unresolved grievances from long ago.

By including family members as early as possible, you are giving them back a measure of control. They become fellow travelers instead of helpless bystanders. Resist the temptation to "go it alone" or assume they don't want to be bothered. This is their loved one, too, and they need a role. How they become engaged will be different for every family, but your invitation to them is a signal of their importance to you and to the family unit.